

# THE BLUE BOOK



THE ECCENTRIC HUMOUR OF  
**CRAD KILODNEY**



THE BLUE BOOK

CRAD KILODNEY

*Crad Kilodney*

---

CHARNEL HOUSE

Toronto, Canada

Also by Crad Kilodney

*Mental Cases* (Lowlands Review, 1978)  
*World Under Anaesthesia* (Charnel House, 1979)  
*Gainfully Employed In Limbo* (Charnel House, 1980)  
*Lightning Struck My Dick* (Virgo Press, 1980)  
*Human Secrets -- Book One* (Charnel House, 1981)  
*Human Secrets -- Book Two* (Charnel House, 1982)  
*Sex Slaves of the Astro-Mutants* (Charnel House, 1982)  
*Terminal Ward* (Charnel House, 1983)  
*Pork College* (Coach House Press, 1984)  
*Bang Heads Here, Suffering Bastards* (Charnel House, 1984)  
*The Orange Book* (Charnel House, 1984)  
*The Green Book* (Charnel House, 1985)

\* \* \* \* \*

## Acknowledgments

Front cover by Arno Wolf Jr.  
Inside drawings by Bruce Hutchinson  
Book design by the author

\* \* \* \* \*

COPYRIGHT © 1985 by Crad Kilodney. All rights reserved  
under the Universal Copyright Convention. Printed in  
Canada.

ISBN 0-9690261-9-6

CHARNEL HOUSE is a private imprint dedicated to artistic  
freedom and free enterprise. It receives no government  
support. Correspondence is welcome and may be addressed  
to P.O. Box 281, Station S, Toronto, Ont. M5M 4L7. Tele-  
phone (416) 482-1341.

## CONTENTS

<i>MR. SCHLEPP AND HIS ACE MECHANIC</i>	5
<i>DREAM STREET</i>	36
<i>WOODEN STICKS WITH POINTS</i>	41



*"The atmosphere is saturated with disaster,  
frustration, futility."*

*Henry Miller*

## MR. SCHLEPP AND HIS ACE MECHANIC

It's a rare individual who can manage to lose his job and his wife on the same day and, what's more, be taken completely by surprise in both cases. That these events struck Sidney Schlepp as unforeseen bolts out of the blue says something about his judgment. That they struck him on the same day says something about his luck.

These two events were not connected. His wife, Doris, had been planning to leave him for some time. She felt "*absolutely suffocated in this house and in this marriage*," as she expressed it in the note she left for him on the kitchen table. As a small act of kindness, she left on a Friday so that he would have the weekend to absorb the shock before having to go to work again.

As for the job, it had been common knowledge at Dart Copiers -- to all except Sidney, bless his innocent heart -- that cutbacks would have to be made because of a declining market, and the appropriate place to cut would be in back of at least one salesman's neck. Sidney had always considered himself a fine salesman. He was courteous, punctual, responsible, had neat handwriting, and enjoyed meeting people. He was not, however, blessed with the killer instinct, and his sales figures showed it. In better times they could have kept him on, but times were lean, and the weak had to be cut out of the herd. The sales manager had put it just that way. As a small kindness to Sidney, he laid him off on a Friday afternoon -- with all that they owed him in a crisp, white envelope -- so that he and his wife would have the weekend to absorb the shock.

Sidney Schlepp felt many emotions simultaneously that day, but the one that soon forced its way to the forefront was the feeling that he had not been *appreciated*. Had he not provided his wife with a home and filled it with the normal trappings of domestic life? Had he not followed a predictable routine as a husband throughout their marriage? Had he not given his company three years of loyal service, extolling the virtues of Dart photocopiers to the maximum extent that truth would allow? Had he not volunteered to



take on the most marginal territories so that customers in far-flung places would know that they mattered in this world?

Sidney did not even bother to turn on the light in the kitchen but merely sat at the table, looking at his wife's note and his final envelope from the company, regarding them alternately, trying to piece them together like two pieces of a puzzle to understand what they meant. The understanding did not come, and as the kitchen grew darker and darker with the fall of night, Sidney just sat there like an invalid. At some point he found his way to bed, lay down with all his clothes on, and drifted with much difficulty into a disturbed sleep.

On Saturday morning, Sidney Schlepp awoke in a house that seemed terribly empty. He thought for a moment that perhaps it had all been a bad dream, but the fateful pieces of evidence lay slightly crumpled on the bed beside him.

Doris was beyond reach. When Sidney called his mother-in-law, Millie, she told him, with apparent regret, that Doris was out of town indefinitely. Yes, he could leave a message. *Sidney called. Call back when convenient.* But Millie cautioned him not to get his hopes up. She said she hoped he would be okay. He did not tell her that he had also just lost his job. She did not tell him that she had always considered him to be a blockhead and unsuited for Doris.

Sidney spent the rest of Saturday in bed with a bottle of whisky, telling the horse on the label, "No one appreciates me," over and over again. The horse seemed to look sympathetic. And when he had numbed himself sufficiently with the whisky and twelve straight hours of television, it was night once more, and he slept, but this time properly, in his pajamas.

On Sunday morning, Sidney awoke with a headache and felt too lethargic to get dressed. The newspaper lay at his doorstep. *Job ads*, he thought vaguely and sat down on the couch with a cup of instant coffee and the classified section. He looked at the *Help Wanted* ads with half a mind, reading ads for jobs that he was neither interested in nor remotely qualified for: hairdressers, exotic dancers,



short-order cooks, lathe operators, aerospace engineers, worm pickers. He thought, *Nice people are looking for these jobs. I hope they are appreciated.* He thought of himself applying for a job and then put the newspaper aside. He could not bear to look for work yet.

Sunday was worse than Saturday because he was out of whisky, and the horse no longer looked sympathetic, and television was more boring.

When he went to bed that night (although in truth he had been in bed almost all day), Sidney experienced a peculiar restlessness. An idea was trying to form in his muddled brain. The part of his brain in charge of the Meaning of Life was trying to kick over like a rusty generator. *Life. Life. What's it mean?* he mused. But he knew he did not have a very smart brain and wasn't too good at stuff like the Meaning of Life since he had never gone to college.

On Monday morning, Sidney awoke with the realization that his routine had been destroyed. His wife was gone, and he had no job to go to. He sat up in bed and thought that the only way to cope with this disruption was to find something specific to do -- some sort of task or errand, however banal. *Is there something I've been meaning to do but kept putting off?* he asked himself. And then it came to him: the car needed a tune-up.

Immediately, Sidney started to feel better -- not a great deal, of course, but somewhat. He had his specific errand, and he got up and prepared himself for the day with a feeling of energy and, yes, a certain pride in his ability to cope. It was a beautiful day out, and Sidney felt encouraged. Perhaps this sudden change in his life was meant to happen so that he would be forced to look at things and think about things in a new way. Perhaps he would find something important to do, some sort of...*meaning* to it all.

Driving toward the Shell station he usually patronized, Sidney became increasingly buoyant. *Here is a man coping with Life. Here is a man getting a tune-up.* The unused part of his brain was acting up again. *This must be what they call expanding one's consciousness.*

The Shell station lot was full today. It was a popular station, although they were not cheap. Sidney was about to pull in when he decided suddenly, *No, they're too busy.*

*They don't need my business*, and he drove further on until he saw an untidy little Beaver station. Its lot was almost empty. Not many people were getting serviced at Beaver. Sidney thought this was sad. He thought they deserved more business, even if they were a small company and looked untidy and unimportant. *They will appreciate a new customer.*

He parked his sturdy, old black Buick in the lot and walked into the office. The only person on duty was a young fellow in his early twenties, standing there with his hands in his pockets. The name *Todd* was stitched on the shirt pocket of his grimy uniform. He looked sleepy.

"Yes?" said Todd.

"Can I leave my car for a tune-up?" asked Sidney.

"Sure. The Buick?" asked Todd, although he had obviously seen Sidney get out of it.

"Yes, the Buick. It needs a tune-up."

"Okay. You'll have to leave it."

"That's fine," said Sidney, putting his spare set of keys on the counter. "Are you the mechanic?"

"Yup. But I'm working the pumps until the boss gets here."

"What a hard worker. Good for you," said Sidney, admiring Todd's grimy uniform, which undoubtedly bespoke ceaseless toil. Todd just stood there. "Are you going to write out a slip or something?"

"A slip? Oh, sure." He got out a blank work order and wrote down Sidney's name and the words *Buick. Tunup.*

"You're not too busy today, looks like."

"We're never busy on Monday."

"What's your busy day?"

"We don't really have one."

"Oh. Well, can I pick up the car around four?"

"Okay," said Todd.

"Good deal," said Sidney, suddenly grasping Todd's hand and shaking it as the young man flinched with fright. "Well, see you later." And he walked out the door toward the bus stop.

A few seconds later, Todd called out after him. "Uh, wait, Mr. Shelp! What kind of tune-up? A minor one or what?"

Sidney thought a moment. "Yes. Whatever. Do what needs to be done. You're the mechanic. I trust you."

"Okay," said Todd.

At 4:00, Sidney returned. His car was in a different spot, so he knew it had been worked on. He walked into the office, where Todd was once again standing with his hands in his pockets.

"Hi. How's my car?"

Todd appeared puzzled for a moment. "Oh, the Buick, right. It's fine. Here's your bill." He handed Sidney the work order, which had ugly black fingerprints all over it. Sidney knew this meant Todd had done one terrific job. The total was \$157.28.

"Gee," said Sidney, "that much for a tune-up?"

"Well, you got new plugs and points and a condenser and rotor. Plus I put in a new gas filter, and I gave the car a safety inspection. There's the parts, and there's the labor," he said, indicating with his finger. "Plus tax."

"Very good. That's superb," said Sidney.

"Cash or charge?"

Sidney did not have a Beaver credit card. In fact, there was no Beaver credit card. "Do you take Visa?"

"Yup," said Todd. He filled out a slip, misspelling "Schlepp" and "tune-up." Sidney was touched. Here was a lad who had not had the benefit of a proper education, yet he had worked his way up to become a master mechanic.

Sidney took a dollar out of his wallet. "Here's something for you."

"Gee, thanks!" said Todd.

They walked out to the car, and Todd started it himself. The engine spluttered, and dark grey exhaust came out the back. He got out and held the door open for Sidney. "It just has to warm up. That's why it sounds a bit rough. Some cars are like that."

"Of course," said Sidney. "You sure know your business, don't you?"

"Yeah," said Todd bashfully.

"Your name is Todd?"

"Right."

Sidney shook his grimy hand again. "Good work, Todd! You're an ace mechanic!"

"Thanks!"

"I could tell the moment I saw you."

"Yeah? Thanks."

Sidney got into the car, waved to Todd, and drove away, the Buick coughing and burping. *Now, this is how a properly tuned car is supposed to sound.*

As the engine warmed up, the coughing and burping improved very slightly. He pulled into his driveway with an immense feeling of satisfaction. Some guys had a good stockbroker behind them. Others had a good banker. And still others had a good lawyer. But Sidney Schlepp now knew that he had an Ace Mechanic behind him, and that made him feel better able to face the world.

On Tuesday, Sidney decided to go to the supermarket. He could barely get the car started. It kept stalling. *A well-tuned car is like that until it gets a chance to warm up,* he reassured himself. When he finally got going, the car seemed sluggish. When he arrived at the supermarket and turned off the ignition, the engine coughed and shuddered for several seconds before stopping. It had never done that before.

He got out and opened the hood, but as he knew nothing about engines, he hadn't the slightest idea of what, precisely, he should be looking at. He closed the hood. *All it needs is a good drive without interruptions. Short trips are hell on a car. Everyone knows that.*

Sidney did his grocery shopping and returned to his car. When he turned the ignition on, the engine roared to life. He revved it with the gas pedal almost down to the floor, then lifted his foot. The car coughed and died. He started it again and kept it revving for a full minute before putting it in drive. The car chugged out of the parking lot. Sidney admitted to himself reluctantly that it didn't sound right.

The Beaver station was out of his way from where he was, but he decided to drive over there and let Todd have a quick look at it. He hoped Todd would not interpret his visit as a lack of confidence in his mechanical genius.

Twenty minutes later, he pulled into the station and stopped at the pumps, as if to buy gas. When he shut off the engine, it gasped and ran on as before. He stepped out and forced a bright smile as Todd came out.

"Fill 'er up, Todd!"



"Right," said Todd. He unhooked the hose and began filling the tank. "How's it running?"

"Oh, fine, fine!" said Sidney. "Um, actually, I wonder if you wouldn't mind checking it. It doesn't run quite right, although I'm sure it has nothing to do with you. I'm probably not handling it properly."

"Okay, I'll have a look." The pump stopped at \$2.62, making Sidney feel foolish, but Todd didn't say a word.

He gave Todd \$3.00. "Keep the change."

"Gee, thanks. Okay, start it up."

Sidney started the car, which made sick noises.

"Shut it off."

Sidney shut it off, and the engine gasped several times before stopping.

"Yeah, you're right," said Todd. "It's got post-ignition firing."

"Really!" said Sidney. "Post-ignition firing! Wow, you really know cars, don't you?"

"Yup," said Todd. "It's no big deal. I'll just adjust the timing for you. Let me take it into the bay."

"I'm terribly sorry to impose on you."

"It's okay. It won't take long."

So Todd took the Buick into the bay, while Sidney waited in the office. The owner, a chubby man with glasses and a crew cut, stepped into the office to get something, nodded to Sidney, and went back into the garage. The minutes passed. Sidney bought a penny gum ball from a dust-covered dispenser marked with the insignia of the Kiwanis Club. The gum was as hard as a rock. He looked at the rack of wilted maps and the stacks of motor oil and windshield washer. After a half hour, he finally heard Todd back the car out of the bay. Sidney went outside. The car did indeed sound better.

"It's okay now," said Todd. "I just retarded the spark for you."

"You're a heck of a mechanic!" said Sidney, pumping his hand enthusiastically. "Thanks a lot!"

"No problem."

Sidney got in and drove off with a friendly wave. When he arrived home and reached for his groceries, one of the paper sacks broke through the bottom, leaving a puddle of melted ice cream on the back seat.

That night, the atoms of the idea that had been stirring in Sidney Schlepp's brain began to crystallize. He had discovered an obscure mechanic named Todd, and he would do for Todd what the world had not done for *him*: he would *appreciate* Todd and make sure the *world* appreciated him, too. Was there not something noble in that boyish face and in that modest, unassuming manner? Was it right that Todd should labor at a dingy Beaver station while other, *lesser* men were earning more money (no doubt) at gleaming Texaco and Shell stations and getting into television commercials as well?

*Television commercials!*

If any mechanic deserved to be in a commercial, it was Todd! The idea simply burned the pajamas off Sidney. He could not fall asleep. So what if he himself was out of work? He could always find a job. What was more important was to bring Todd, his Ace Mechanic, into the Light of Glory.

He picked up the phone book to look up the head office of the Beaver Oil Company. There was a number but, oddly enough, no address. Anyway, it was no use calling at this hour.

He stood up and walked around. Inspiration wanted to burst through the pores of his skin. He looked at himself in the mirror and no longer saw a wimpy, pajama-clad figure but a Prime Mover, a Visionary.

Although it was after midnight, Sidney felt more awake than he had ever felt in his life. He had to get out and go for a long drive -- let his mind unfold, breathe the air, feel the wind in his face, marvel at the beauty of God's Creation and the other fine things to be seen in the suburbs.

He was in his car and headed for the highway in no time. It was a fine drive with nary a red light to interrupt his ecstasy. He followed the rectangular circuit of highways around the city and felt in his romantic heart that the Highway of Destiny was carrying him off into the night. He made the complete circuit twice. The car ran fine at highway speed, but it did not seem to accelerate well on the ramps. When he finally arrived home, he noticed that his gas gauge was down to nearly one-half. He had burned an incredible amount of gas, and he'd spent enough time behind the wheel as a salesman to have a rough sense of mileage. *Something's wrong here*, thought Sidney.

The next morning, feeling very embarrassed, Sidney took the car back to the Beaver station. As he pulled in, he could see Todd look up from the car he was working on in the lot. He looked unhappy.

Sidney parked next to him and got out, smiling. "Good morning, Todd!" he said cheerily.

"Good morning. Uh, is something the matter?"

"Now, don't worry. I'm not in any way dissatisfied with your work. Not in the least." He patted Todd on the shoulder. Todd flinched. "Not in the least. But now that you're my personal mechanic, I wouldn't trust my car to anyone else. No, sir! I said to myself, 'If there's a teensy weensy problem, just take it to Todd. He'll know what to do.'"

"What's wrong?"

"Well, um, maybe it's nothing, but the car has used up nearly half a tank of gas since yesterday, and it doesn't accelerate well. Of course, it could all be in my head, ha, ha. But you wouldn't mind setting a good customer's mind at ease, would you?"

"Sure. I mean, no."

"If you're busy, I can come back another time."

Todd let out a sigh of indecision and looked around. The station was not busy. He wiped his hands. "Let me give it a quick road test."

"Great idea! Let's go!" said Sidney, handing him the keys.

"You're coming, too?" asked Todd nervously.

"Of course, so you can explain things to me."

They got into the car, and Todd started it. He listened to the engine. "Sounds okay."

"I'm sorry. I feel foolish for bothering you."

"It's okay. You can bother me if you have to."

*This lad has character*, thought Sidney.

Todd drove onto the main street and depressed the pedal at odd intervals to check the car's response.

"You're a true diagnostician, Todd. I can tell by the way you use your foot."

"I'm a what?"

"A diagnostician. You know how to figure out what's wrong."



"Well, I ain't figured it out yet, but we'll drive a little bit and see."

"Good idea. Say, you can turn on the radio if you like. I know you young chaps like music to work by."

Todd thought for a moment. "Okay." He turned the radio on to a popular AM station.

*...Mindless Monkey, do the Mindless Monkey*

*It's the latest dance when you're looking for romance...*

"By the way, Todd, what's your last name?"

"My last name?" He looked at Sidney suspiciously for a second. "Frankfurter. Kind of a funny name, I guess." He grinned.

*...Mindless Monkey, do the Mindless Monkey*

*It's the greatest dance for those who wear tight pants...*

"Not at all! It's a splendid name! There was a Supreme Court Justice named Felix Frankfurter."

"Oh, yeah? Here in Canada?"

*...Oh, it's so great to be a vertebrate*

*So come on, everybody, let's regurgitate...*

"No, the U.S. Supreme Court. Felix Frankfurter was a great man. Maybe you're related to him."

"I don't think so. Somebody in my family would've told me."

*...Mindless Monkey, do the Mindless Monkey*

*It's the latest dance, so come on, take a chance...*

Sidney was tapping his foot. "Some of these new things ain't too bad. I kinda like 'em."

"Yeah, me, too," said Todd.

*...Mindless Monkey, do the Mindless Monkey*

*Come on, everybody, be a vertebrate...*

"You know, I could find out if you're related to Felix Frankfurter."

"Oh, yeah? How?"

"I could do research in the library. It's very common for people to have famous relatives and not know it."

*...Oh, it's so fine to be a stupid swine*

*Oh, it's so neat to eat some smelly meat...*

"Yeah? I suppose."

"After all, how many Frankfurters are there in the world? I think it's very likely."

*...Mindless Monkey, do the Mindless Monkey*

*It's a funky dance for jumping on some ants...*

"None of my family came from the States, though."

"It could have been from an old branch of the family tree. That's what genealogy is all about."

*...Mindless Monkey, do the Mindless Monkey  
Come on, monkey baby, climb up in my tree...*

"Is that what business you're in?"

"Me? No, I'm in, uh, sort of public relations. In the general area of public relations."

*...We'll share a Mindless Monkey kind of joy  
My monkey girl and me, your monkey boy...*

"I'd better listen to your engine." Todd turned off the radio. "Gee, you must have an important job."

"Well..." Sidney smiled. "Important or not, I still appreciate the common man. The world doesn't appreciate guys like you enough." This time it was Todd's turn to smile.

"No, really, I mean it. It's the ordinary people like you who make this country what it is."

"That's for sure," said Todd. They had come to a red light. Todd made a right turn and stepped on the gas. "This car isn't quite right, but I don't know why."

"Oh, then there *is* something wrong."

"I think so. I'll take it back and have a look."

*This lad is a born mechanic*, thought Sidney. "What does your father do, Todd?"

"My father's dead. He died when I was twelve."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"It's okay."

*The poor lad. There's no man to guide him through life.  
Every boy needs a man.*

They were soon back at the Beaver station. "I'll put it in the bay if you want to wait a few minutes."

"Sure," said Sidney.

He waited in the office. The owner came in to deposit some money in the register. "What's the matter? Your car still ain't right?"

"Just a minor adjustment, I think."

The owner shook his head and walked back out to attend to another car. When he came back in to put a charge slip in the register, he shook his head again and remarked, "It's getting harder to find good help these days."

"Yes, it is...What? Wait a minute! Todd's a fine mechanic!"

The owner smiled faintly. "He's a bit inexperienced, but he's a nice boy." He went back outside.

*Of all the nerve!* thought Sidney. *His boss doesn't appreciate him!*

After twenty minutes, he saw Todd backing the car out. The young mechanic got out and came into the office. "It was a cracked distributor cap. I don't know how I missed it before. I'm sorry."

"Think nothing of it, Todd!" Sidney replied with vehemence. "It can happen to anybody!"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Anybody can make a mistake! To err is human, to forgive divine!"

Todd gave him a puzzled look, then reached for a blank invoice. "I have to charge you for it. The distributor cap, I mean."

"Gladly! Gladly! You're a professional, and you deserve to be paid for your work!" He leaned closer and added confidentially, hand cupped to his mouth, "I just hope your boss realizes what a good mechanic he's got."

Todd chuckled nervously, not sure whether Sidney was being sarcastic or not. He leafed through the huge parts catalogue on the counter, his grimy finger wandering uncertainly over the page like a planchette on a Ouija board. He then reached for the adding machine and pecked away. He seemed unused to the machine, and when he arrived at his final total he stared at it for a second. "Fifteen twenty-five," he announced, and started writing out the bill.

"Fifteen twenty-five?"

"*Installed*," he added quickly. "That's the price installed. I had to install it, like."

"Of course! Of course!" Sidney handed him the exact amount. "I see big things in your future, Todd. *Big* things."

"Like what?" Todd's hand froze above the till.

"Never mind. Leave it to old Sid Schlepp. I'm going to do things for you."

Todd dropped the quarter in the wrong tray. "Uh, that's okay. Don't go to any trouble." He fumbled with the ten and five.

"No trouble at all. You'll be hearing from me." Sidney went out, clutching his receipt, as Todd stood at the register, looking vaguely queasy.

As Sidney approached his car, he intercepted the owner. "That boy deserves a raise! He's the best damn mechanic I ever met!"

The owner looked at him in bewilderment. "He got a raise two months ago."

"A mechanic like that can command good money in a prestige company. If any of the big conglomerates knew about him, they'd snatch him up like *that*," Sidney added with an attempted snap of the fingers that made no sound at all.

The owner wasn't sure what to say. "Well, glad you like him. Come back any time."

Sidney drove home, his mind working so feverishly that he ran a stop sign and failed to yield to another car at a yield sign. He was oblivious to the complaining honk behind him.

Upon arriving home, he dashed inside and opened the phone book and dialed the number of the Beaver Oil Company.

*"Good afternoon. Beaver Oil."*

"Hello. Connect me with the public relations department, please."

*"What department?"*

"Public relations."

*"Oh...I'll connect you with Mr. Hopper. Hold on."*

There was another ring. *"Hello. Hopper here."*

"Hello, Mr. Hopper?"

*"Yes?"*

"My name is Sidney Schlepp. I'm a customer of one of your stations. I'm calling about a mechanic named Todd Frankfurter."

*"What seems to be the problem?"*

"There's no problem. In fact, I'm so delighted with this mechanic that I think he should be put in one of your TV commercials! He's a great guy!"

Mr. Hopper cleared his throat. *"Well, that's very nice, but actually we don't have any TV commercials. We're not that big a company."*

"Well, I think you should definitely create a TV commercial and put him in it!"

*"Umm..."*

"It would be great for your company! Todd Frankfurter could be your mascot, sort of. You know, a symbol of the company."



"Uh, well...As I said, we're not doing any TV commercials in the foreseeable future, so I--"

"You can't let that boy languish in oblivion! Listen, there's a ninety-percent chance that he's a direct descendant of Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter!"

"Oh," said Mr. Hopper, who now knew he had a nut on his hands. "Yes, of course. Well, you may have a good idea there, Mr., uh..."

"Schlepp. Sidney Schlepp."

"Mr. Schlepp. Yes. I tell you what. I'll take this up with our idea people and see what develops. What's the mechanic's name again?"

"Todd Frankfurter."

Mr. Hopper made scratching noises with his pencil to satisfy Sidney. "And what station is he at?"

"The one on Glenwood Road."

"Uh, huh, I know the one."

"Do you want my phone number? I'd like to be available to help with the commercial. I have some unusual concepts."

"Of course. What's your number?" Mr. Hopper made more fake pencil noises as Sidney spoke. "Thank you, Mr. Schlepp. We appreciate your interest. Goodbye."

Sidney hung up, feeling exultant and powerful. He had gotten the ball rolling! Soon Todd's boyish face would be looking out at millions of people! And there would be money -- lots of it! But, of course, the money was not the main thing. The main thing was the world's appreciation of a diamond in the rough -- Todd Frankfurter, Ace Mechanic.

At dinner time, Millie called. "I just wanted to see how you were. Are you okay?"

"Fine, Millie, fine! Never better! How's Doris?"

"Oh, Doris is fine."

"Well, that's fine! Glad to hear it!"

Millie had not expected such ebullience. "You sure you're okay?"

"Of course, I am!"

"How are things at work?"

"Excellent! I'm getting into some new areas!"

"Oh?"

"Television! But never mind, I don't want to say too much at this point."

"Oh." There was a pause. "Okay, Sid, just take care of yourself."

"I will, Millie. Give my regards to Doris."

"Sure will. Bye-bye."

That evening, Sidney sat down at his desk to do some hard thinking about Todd's TV debut. He pictured the Beaver stationed, cleaned up and repainted for the commercial. Todd would be leaning over the engine of a limousine as the narrator spoke of *"your friendly neighborhood Beaver station and its expert mechanics."* Then Todd, in a spotless uniform, perhaps gold or orange, would look up at the camera and make an "okay" sign with his hand. Then the camera would move back, and a rainbow would appear over the Beaver station, and there would be some appropriately majestic music.

Sidney also thought it would be nice to get Todd written up on the "Neighbors" page of the Sunday newspaper. He made a few notes, which began like this: *"Every car owner feels good knowing there's an Ace Mechanic standing behind him. That's why thousands of suburbanites flock to the Beaver station on Glenwood Road to be taken care of by the steady hands and sharp eyes of Todd Frankfurter. This handsome, young lad, a descendant of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, has worked his way up the ladder of success and will soon be the key figure in a major new TV ad campaign by the Beaver Oil Company..."* Sidney hoped the newspaper's staff would not object to being given a rough draft to work from. It was important to make sure the tone of the article was sufficiently enthusiastic without sounding silly.

Thus absorbed, he lost track of time for several hours until his empty stomach nagged him back to reality. He leaned back and stretched, looking at his watch. It was after ten -- not too late to go out for a milk shake at Bimbo-Burger. Actually, he had always hated Bimbo-Burger because the place was always full of idiot teenagers who drove souped-up cars decorated in the most ridiculous manner. But now Sidney thought it was about time these kids got a look at a well-tuned Buick driven by a responsible adult and worked on by a master mechanic.

Sidney drove out onto the bright suburban road that was lined with fast-food places, used car lots, and small shopping plazas. He pulled into the lot at Bimbo-Burger and

parked between a Camaro and a Mustang. A knot of teenagers were leaning against one car, eating their burgers and fries and talking about cars. Sidney got out and, in order to call attention to himself and his Buick, opened the hood and pretended to peer in as if checking some minor detail.

"Got a problem, mister?" asked a long-haired teenager.

"Are you kidding? This machine is in perfect condition. I was just checking, uh, the wing nut on the air filter." And he reached in and pretended to tighten the wing nut. He heard suppressed giggles behind him as he closed the hood and then strode into Bimbo-Burger with a step that was meant to convey Mastery Over Life.

When he came out with his milk shake, he saw two of the teenagers looking underneath the front of his car.

"What are you doing?" asked Sidney sternly.

"I smell gasoline. You might have a leak," said the same long-haired fellow.

"Impossible! This car has just been tuned up. My mechanic is the best in the business."

"Well, I still smell gas."

"I smell it, too," said the other one. "Would you like us to have a look? We know a lot about cars."

"No, thanks," said Sidney, getting inside.

"Really, no kidding," the second teenager persisted.

"I'm not bullshitting you, mister. You could have a leak in your gas line. I'd be glad to have a look."

Sidney was disturbed by this suggestion. Todd Frankfurter's professional competence was being attacked behind his back, and it was up to Sidney to protect it. "My mechanic wouldn't send me out on the road with a leak in my gas line."

"You better have it checked out," said the teenager.

"Well..." Sidney considered the matter. "I'll go to a gas station. Thanks anyway." He started the car, backed out, and drove away, his mind so distracted that he finished his milk shake without consciously tasting it.

He knew the Beaver station would not be open this late. In fact, it would be hard to find any station open other than a self-serve gas bar. He drove along the main road for a while and finally spotted a Sunoco station that looked promising. He pulled up near the office, away from the pumps.

One of the two attendants came out. "Hi. Can I help



you?"

"Sorry to bother you, but is there a mechanic on duty?"

"Well, that depends," said the attendant, smiling.

"What seems to be the problem?" The other attendant came out to join the first. They had been playing cards.

"I think possibly I may have a gas leak."

One attendant opened the hood while his partner went back inside and returned with a flashlight.

"I sure smell gas, all right," said the first attendant.

"Yeah," said the other, as he instinctively put his light on the gas filter and began feeling all around it. He straightened up and declared, "Filter's leaking."

"My God!" said Sidney. "It's a new filter!"

The attendant shook his head and smirked. "That filter's a piece of shit. Where'd you get it?"

"It was put in at the Beaver station."

The other attendant snickered. "Figures. Only a cheap outfit like that would use such a cheap part."

"Listen, I have a damned good mechanic!" said Sidney with some heat.

"I can leave the filter in if you want," said the attendant, grinning.

Sidney thought a moment. "No, I guess you'd better replace it. Provided you're qualified to do that sort of thing, of course."

"Oh, I think between the two of us we can manage."

Sidney went into the office and sat down. He looked around at its orderly shelves and noticed the plaque on the wall, awarded by Sunoco to its dealer for "Outstanding Service." *Typical corporate back-patting. They just love to feel superior*, thought Sidney. He decided that he hated Sunoco and everything they stood for. He didn't like the mechanics in their commercials either. They weren't real mechanics at all, just actors. It was totally phony.

His contempt percolated for several minutes until the first attendant walked in and tossed Sidney's old gas filter into the waste basket with an emphatic clunk. "Okay, you got a *proper* filter now."

"Thanks," said Sidney without enthusiasm.

The attendant scribbled a bill for him. "That'll be five thirty-five, including tax."

*Outrageous!* thought Sidney. He paid the bill and went

outside, where he found the other attendant fingering the fan belt.

"Your fan belt looks kind of worn. I'd get it replaced if I were you."

"I just had a thorough tune-up and an inspection. Wouldn't a mechanic check things like that?"

"Yeah, if he had half a brain." The words were like a stake in Sidney's heart, and the sound of the hood being closed with a resounding clang was a hammer driving the stake in deeper. "Maybe you should change stations."

"*I am loyal to my mechanic*," said Sidney stiffly, as he got into his car.

"What's the matter with Sunoco? You don't like us? We're a first-rate company."

"Maybe next time," said Sidney, as he started the car and pulled away. *Bastards! They're really desperate for customers!*

As Sidney headed home, the thought occurred to him that he ought to go back and retrieve that allegedly defective gas filter and have it tested by a lab. Such slander against the fine name of Beaver could not be tolerated! But then there *had* been a smell of gas, and even the kids at Bimbo-Burger had thought there was a leak. Sidney pulled over and stopped, then got a small flashlight out of his glove compartment. He got out and opened the hood and stuck his head inside. By the dim light of his weak flashlight he could see the shiny, new filter. There was no longer a smell of gas. *Okay, so Todd gave me a bad filter, but only by coincidence. One chance in a million. He's still my Ace Mechanic!* And Sidney closed the hood, got back in his car, and returned home.

Sidney had difficulty falling asleep that night. He kept replaying the gas filter incident in his mind, imagining variations of it. In one variation, he demanded that the regional service manager of Sunoco be summoned to the station to verify that Sidney's original gas filter was defective and write out a sworn statement to that effect. In another version, Sidney imagined dousing himself with gasoline and threatening to set himself afire unless the Sunoco attendants apologized for slandering Todd. And in the most exciting version, Sidney went out and caught the Sunoco

attendants deliberately damaging his original gas filter to con him and then beat them up.

When Sidney finally fell asleep, he dreamed of himself and Todd hiking over steep mountains and across a desert and through a jungle, as hidden voices laughed at them, like the canned laughter on TV. In a jungle clearing, they found a broken tricycle, its wheels bent out of shape, and Todd took some tools out of his pocket and attempted to fix it. Nothing about the tricycle seemed to change except that the seat became elongated so that both could sit on it at once. Sidney sat very close behind Todd and could feel his ass and thighs, and as he held on to Todd's waist, Todd clumsily pedaled the trike. Sidney's last image in the dream was of the two of them pedaling absurdly, inches at a time, on misshapen wheels through impenetrable jungle foliage, and his last thought was wishing for a machete to help clear the way for Todd.

Sidney awoke very late to the sounds of lawn mowers buzzing over his neighbors' lawns. His lawn needed mowing, too, but it would have to wait. Right now, he was devoting himself full time to the cause of Todd Frankfurter, his Ace Mechanic.

The incident of last evening had upset him, but he was over it now. After a late breakfast, he looked over his draft for the newspaper article about Todd. He had taken it as far as he could, he thought, and it was up to the newspaper to take it from there.

Sidney called the paper and got connected with the editor of the "Neighbors" page. He plunged right in about Todd, whom he described as a "fascinating person and the world's greatest mechanic." The editor, a woman in her thirties, sounded interested at first. But as Sidney went on, talking excitedly about gas filters and post-ignition firing and TV commercials and Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter and how some boys turn to drugs and crime without a man around the house, the editor became strangely cold and impatient until at last she said she had an urgent story to cover and had to hang up. "I'll follow up on this when I have the time," she told him.

Sidney was slightly puzzled but decided that the woman had probably excused herself to go to the bathroom. No doubt, she was interested. He would mail her his draft as

a reminder. He put his handwritten pages in an envelope, along with a note referring to "*our delightful chat of Thursday afternoon,*" and stamped and addressed it.

After this clearing of his desk, he rediscovered the envelope from Dart with his severance cheque and realized he had to go to the bank. It was close to the end of banking hours. He would have to hurry.

He got in his car and headed for his bank, glancing at his watch every minute or so. When he pulled into the shopping centre where his bank was located, he became aware of steam coming out from under his hood. He parked, got out, and opened the hood. Steam was gushing out of his radiator. He looked under the car. A greenish puddle was forming under the radiator. He had lost his coolant.

"Damn!" exclaimed Sidney. *Todd, I know it's not your fault! God is testing my faith in you!*

He missed the bank by one minute, which was merely an inconvenience. What was more serious was the fact that he could not drive his car. There was nothing to do but call the auto club.

The auto club service truck arrived a half hour later. The driver, an athletic-looking blond, remarked with a smile, "Lost your coolant, eh? Too bad. Probably a bad hose." He twisted off the radiator cap with a rag, looked in, then looked underneath. "Yup, you lost every drop."

"Can I drive if I put some water in it?" asked Sidney.

"You won't get very far. I'll have to tow you. Let me just get your membership number." When they had gotten into the truck and the driver had filled out the form, he asked Sidney where he wanted to be towed.

"The Beaver station on Glenwood Road," replied Sidney, eyes straight ahead and a slight lump in his throat.

"Beaver? Why Beaver?"

"My personal mechanic works there."

"Oh," said the driver, giving Sidney a dubious look.

"Must be a relative, right?"

"No, he's a good mechanic, and I'm loyal to him."

"Oh. Okay."

Sidney was silent all the way to the station. He hoped Todd would not feel bad about seeing him yet again.

The owner met them as they drove in. "What is it this time?"



"I lost my coolant, heh, heh," replied Sidney nervously. "The driver thinks it's the hose."

The owner went into the garage, where Todd was working under a car on the rack. *"It's that guy again,"* Sidney heard him say. Todd looked out at Sidney and the Buick, now being unhitched from the tow truck. Sidney smiled and waved. Todd had a pained expression. He came out timidly. His boss said to him, "Did you check this guy's hoses?"

"I don't know. I guess so," said Todd.

Sidney stepped forward. "Hello, Todd! Now, don't be upset. It's no big deal. I needed a fresh fill of anti-freeze anyway."

"That anti-freeze looked pretty fresh to me," remarked the auto club driver to Sidney, handing him his service form on a clipboard for his signature.

*"Quiet,"* said Sidney, scribbling his signature. That accomplished, the driver got back in his truck and drove off.

"You, uh, lost your anti-freeze?" asked Todd hesitantly.

"It's just bad luck. It's not your fault, Todd."

The owner had the hood up and his head stuck in behind the radiator. Todd peered in from another angle. "There it is," said his boss. "That's where it's leaking."

"Where?"

"Right in front of you. Right there. The hose. You see that?"

"Oh, yeah." He straightened up. "I'll replace it right away," he said to Sidney.

Sidney could not bear to wait in the office again. "I'm going to the donut shop. I'll be back in a little while."

When he came back, the car was ready. The owner presented him with the bill -- \$62.81. "That includes the clamps," he said.

"Sounds reasonable," said Sidney. "Um, I'll have to charge it."

On the way out, he went into the garage to see Todd. The young man looked as though he were about to be severely scolded. When Sidney thrust his hand out to shake, Todd flinched. "Todd," he said, grasping his hand, "I want you to know I have the utmost confidence in you. What's more, I *appreciate* you -- not only as a mechanic but also as a human being."

"Thanks. I also tightened your fan belt for nothing."

"You're a fine fellow." Sidney clapped him on the shoulder. "Some idiot at Sunoco told me the belt was no good, but I didn't believe him."

"It's okay. It just needed tightening."

"Ah, these little tricks of the trade. You know them all, don't you, Todd, heh, heh."

"What?" said Todd, disconcerted.

"No, I meant...Ha, ha, I only meant that you know all the fine points of your trade."

"Yeah," said Todd, smiling nervously.

"How about dinner some time?"

"What?" said Todd, alarmed.

"You know, to discuss your future. I've set the ball rolling. I called a contact of mine at Beaver Oil about getting you on television."

"Who, me? On television?"

"Yes, sir! And he went for it, let me tell you! You're going to be in a commercial!"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not really--"

"Don't worry. It won't be for a while yet. These things take time. You busy for dinner?"

"Yes," said Todd quickly. "I always eat dinner at home with my mother."

"Well..." said Sidney, rubbing his chin. "Maybe I'll drop by and treat you to lunch one day next week."

"I'm pretty busy, sir. Believe me, I have to watch the pumps and, uh, all the rest of it."

"Call me Sid. Don't be so formal."

"Yes, sir. Well, excuse me. I got to wash up."

Sidney got back in his car. He looked at his bill again. Todd's handwriting was almost illegible. He could barely make out "*enstall antefreeze*."

*This boy should have a college education!* he thought as he drove home.

After a TV dinner for supper, Sidney checked the phone book to see if he could find Todd's home address. Of the two listings for Frankfurter, one had to be ruled out because it was in a very rich neighborhood. The other was *Frankfurter, S., 32 Roxton Road*. Sidney felt inspired. He would drop by the house and surprise Todd and his mother!

The house on Roxton Road was a very modest, old house

with a small, neat front lawn and a narrow flower bed. Sidney parked in front and went to the door and rang the bell.

Shuffling footsteps came to the door, which opened to reveal a plain-looking, middle-aged woman in a beige house dress. "Yes?" she asked.

"Hello. Does Todd live here?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I brought him something." He held up a booklet.

She squinted through the screen door. "I haven't got my glasses on."

"Are you his mother?"

"Yes."

"I'm honored to meet you, Mrs. Frankfurter!" he said with enthusiasm. "I'm Sidney Schlepp. I'm doing some publicity for Beaver Oil. Todd knows me from the gas station. I'm sure he's mentioned me to you."

"Just a minute." She closed the door just enough to block Sidney's view. He could barely hear the conversation within.

*"Todd, it's that guy from the gas station."*

*"Oh, no. What's he want?"*

*"He has a book for you."*

*"Oh, shit."*

*"Should I tell him you're busy?"*

*"Oh, Christ."*

Heavier footsteps walked up some stairs, then to the door. The door opened. "Hi," said Todd unhappily.

"Hi, Todd! Look what I brought you!"

"What?"

"It's a catalogue from Iroquois College. I thought you should have a look at it."

Todd unlocked the screen door and opened it reluctantly. "I was just watching TV."

"Fine! Fine!" said Sidney, stepping inside. Mrs. Frankfurter stood with her hands clasped at her waist, not knowing what to do.

"Uh, this is Mr., uh, what's your name again?"

"Sid Schlepp."

"Yeah, right. Uh, this is my mother."

Sidney shook hands with her. "Pleased to meet you!"

"Thank you."

"You've got a fine son, Mrs. Frankfurter. One of the



finest young fellows I've ever met."

"Yes, I know. He's a hard worker. And when he gets home from work he's tired and just wants to relax and be left alone."

"Of course, of course. Listen, I've taken a great interest in Todd's future. I want to do things for him."

"Oh? How nice," she said uncertainly.

"Todd, you should look at this catalogue. You have the makings of an engineer. Believe me. Now, Iroquois College offers an associate degree that could lead to a professional engineering degree."

"Well, I don't know. I don't really think--"

At that moment, a sound like a plastic cup falling on the floor emanated from the downstairs den, and Mrs. Frankfurter said, "Excuse me for a second," and went downstairs.

"And as for that TV commercial," Sidney went on, "that's going to open doors for you! And I've called the newspaper about doing a feature on you! It'll be great!"

"Uh, yeah." Todd looked toward the stairs. His mother came back up.

"It's okay, it's nothing," she said. "We have Grandpa downstairs," she explained to Sidney.

"Wonderful! I'd like to meet him!" And he was on his way down the stairs before anyone could stop him.

As Sidney came into the den, where the TV was on, he saw a very thin, old man lying on his back on the couch with a blanket over him. Tubes ran into his nose from a portable oxygen tank on the floor.

"Mr. Frankfurter! I'm so glad to meet you!" He shook the old man's limp hand. "I'm Sidney Schlepp! I'm Todd's best customer!" The old man's eyes turned toward him, but his face remained frozen and expressionless. "Your grandson's going to be in a TV commercial! I'm arranging it!"

"He's deaf," said Mrs. Frankfurter from the foot of the stairs.

Sidney raised his voice. "IT'S A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, MR. FRANKFURTER! BY ANY CHANCE, ARE YOU RELATED TO SUPREME COURT JUSTICE FELIX FRANKFURTER?"

"His name's Walters," said Mrs. Frankfurter. "He's my father."

"Oh." Sidney pumped the old man's hand again. "IT'S OKAY. NEVER MIND." The old man's throat gurgled slightly.

Todd and his mother looked at each other awkwardly. "Well, thanks for the catalogue," said Todd. "I'll look at it some time."

"I'll see you to the door," said Mrs. Frankfurter.

Sidney smiled to hide his disappointment. He'd anticipated a long, serious discussion over drinks. "Oh...Of course." He walked upstairs with Mrs. Frankfurter. "Make sure Todd reads that catalogue. It's vital to his future."

She lowered her voice at the front door. "Look, sir, no offense, but Todd's been very nervous lately. Maybe you better not see him again. I think you're upsetting him."

"Upsetting him? Oh, now really!" replied Sidney, piqued. "Maybe I see potential in your son that you don't! That boy's a first-class engineer! Perhaps you don't appreciate his talent!"

"I appreciate him plenty," she said, opening the door for Sidney.

He paused at the threshold, fighting off the feeling that perhaps he shouldn't have paid them this visit.

"There's an old saying, Mrs. Frankfurter. When opportunity knocks, you must open the door. Or something to that effect."

"Would you answer me just one question -- *honestly?*"

"What?"

"Are you a homosexual?"

"Certainly not!" And Sidney left the house. *Stupid woman! Imagine being stuck with a mother like that!*

He drove home in a rage. But by the time he had entered his own house, he was calm again. *No need to feel upset*, he thought. He would let Todd take the evening to look at the catalogue. Then he'd drop by the gas station tomorrow and invite him out for lunch and have a good heart-to-heart, man-to-man conversation so that Todd would understand how much Sidney appreciated him as a human being.

On Friday morning, Sidney called Beaver Oil again.

"This is Sid Schlepp. Let me speak to Mr. Hopper, please."

"*Just a moment,*" replied the receptionist. "*I have to put you on hold.*" A few seconds later she came back on.

"*I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Hopper is not in today. Would you care to leave a message?*"

"Uh, no...yes...no, never mind. I'll call him on Monday."

*"Thank you. Goodbye."*

*Strange, thought Sidney. They wouldn't be trying to put me off, by any chance, would they?*

The day was not sunny and warm. It was chilly and damp, and the sky was leaden. This put Sidney in an unhappy mood. He fell into morbid introspection and felt that things were not going as well as he'd hoped. At times the image of Todd came into his mind vividly. For some strange reason, he saw the face on a commemorative postage stamp (*Todd Frankfurter -- Ace Mechanic. 32¢*) But then the image would fade away and be replaced by the image of Mrs. Frankfurter in her house dress or the old grandfather lying on the couch with tubes in his nose.

He snapped himself out of his melancholia with a shower and a shave. As long as there was something specific to do, he could motivate himself to carry on. Today he would surprise Todd for lunch. He didn't know when, but noon was as good a time as any. What if the owner protested? Sidney would say, *"This is business. I'm on business for the head office."* Not very convincing. Well, anyway, it was a free country, and if he wanted to drop in on his friendly neighborhood mechanic, what of it? People in commercials did it all the time.

On the way to the gas station, Sidney pumped himself up with positive thoughts. Things would work out fine. It was Destiny.

When he pulled into the station, he saw the owner working on a car in the lot. A young fellow he'd never seen before was testing a tire.

The owner pretended not to notice him.

"Hi. Is Todd here?"

"Nope. What is it this time? Whatever it is, I'm too busy today. All I got is me and my part-timer."

"Where's Todd?"

"He's home. His grandfather died."

"Oh, no! That's terrible! I was only there just last evening!"

The owner straightened up and eyed him suspiciously.

"What were you doing there?"

"Uh, business," replied Sidney weakly. "It has to do

with some publicity for Beaver."

The owner squinted one eye at him and cocked his head, then returned to the battery he was replacing. "He ain't coming in today. You got a problem with the car?"

"No, not really."

"Then what did you want him for?"

"Oh, I was just going to invite him for lunch."

The owner paused, his wrench tightened around the nut of a clamp, and looked at Sidney again with barely concealed hostility. The part-timer, a boy of sixteen, was taking all this in with a mixture of fascination and alarm. "Look, if the car's okay, there's no reason to come around here. This ain't a social club." He returned to the clamp.

"Well!" said Sidney. "If that's the way you treat your best customers." He waited for a rebuttal but got none. The owner yanked the cable off one electrode. "What funeral home is the old man at?"

"I don't know," said the owner, not looking at him.

Sidney looked around him, and in that moment the gas station seemed shabby and unwelcoming. When he caught the other boy looking at him, he felt suddenly foolish and went back to his car and drove off.

He headed toward home but considered going to Todd's house again to convey his condolences. Indecision beset him. Perhaps he would not be welcome. So he continued home and felt depressed once again. It began to rain, and it was cold enough to require the heater. But when he switched it on, it didn't heat. The damp air merely fogged his windshield so that he had to wipe it with his handkerchief. *That heater always worked before*, he thought. *Perhaps Todd accidentally...* He hated himself for thinking such a thought. A poor boy with a dying grandfather could be forgiven any number of mistakes.

When he arrived home, he sat at the kitchen table, deflated by the shock of the unexpected, as he had been on the previous Friday. But this time it was raining out, and the house seemed even gloomier. After brooding for a while in the kitchen, he went into the bedroom and tried to watch television. But his mind was preoccupied with Todd and the funeral. *Shouldn't I be there?* If only he knew what to do. He lay on his bed for several hours, trying to weigh the true meaning of every word and action of the preceeding week. But



he was no longer sure of anything. The overcast sky seemed like a veil descending upon all his glorious plans for Todd. Worst of all was the sick feeling that Todd no longer liked him and didn't want to see him again. *What have I done wrong? Somehow, I've made the wrong impression. The mother didn't like me, that's it. She's got me all wrong, and she's got Todd believing the wrong things.*

He could not sit still a moment longer. *I have to show them I care. I'll go to the funeral, if it's not too late, or call on them at home.*

He got into his car and drove to the Frankfurter home once again, although he did not expect to find them there. He had not even thought of putting on his raincoat, and the rain soaked his head and collar as he walked up the steps to the front door and rang the bell. There was no answer.

He went next door and rang the neighbors' bell. A lady came to the door. "Yes?"

"Hello. By any chance, do you happen to know where the Frankfurters are?"

"They're at a funeral, I believe. There's been a death in the family."

"Yes, I know. I was just trying to find out what funeral home they might be at."

"I think she mentioned the Jensen Funeral Home."

"Jensen? Thank you!" And Sidney ran back to his car, energized by a surge of adrenalin.

Friday's early rush hour was just beginning, and he drove impatiently, cursing every red light, until he finally arrived at the Jensen Funeral Home around 4:30.

He walked in and said to the receptionist, "I'm here for the Frankfurter funeral."

"Frankfurter? No, you mean Walters," the man corrected him.

"Right. Walters."

"It's not here. It's in Bollenville."

"Bollenville?"

"Yes, Mr. Walters was to be buried at the Bollenville Cemetary, so I would assume that's where they're holding the service." He looked at his watch. "The cars left here nearly two hours ago." The receptionist's tone was impeccably proper, and he did not smile.

"Gee, I wonder why they'd bury him in Bollenville," said

Sidney softly to himself.

"As I understand it, Mr. Walters was to be buried in a family plot there. I really don't know all the details, but I understand his side of the family is from around those parts."

Sidney just stood there, shaking his head. "Bollenville," he mumbled.

"I'm very sorry you've missed them," said the receptionist, although he did not sound sorry at all.

"I don't suppose I might catch up with them in time," said Sidney, looking at his watch.

"It's highly unlikely, considering the distance."

Sidney looked around absent-mindedly, making little tsking noises with his tongue, then suddenly pulled out his wallet. "Give me the biggest bunch of flowers you've got!"

"We don't sell flowers here. This is a funeral home."

"Oh, of course. Jesus, what was I thinking?" Sidney covered his eyes with one hand for a second. "God...well...uh...be seeing you. I mean--" He cut himself short and walked out quickly.

Bollenville was nearly eighty miles away, but Sidney was determined to catch up with the funeral party at the cemetery. Surely, that more than anything else would convince Todd and his mother of his sincerity.

The drive into the country was uncomfortable. The heater didn't work, and the windshield kept fogging up. On the seat beside Sidney lay a bunch of roses, hastily obtained at the first florist he could find. There were no funeral wreaths ready-made.

As darkness fell, Sidney turned on his headlights and found only one working, but he forged ahead on the narrow highway, exceeding the speed limit. In his anxiety he made a wrong turn and went a good fifteen miles out of his way. By the time he reached Bollenville, it was quite dark. He had to ask directions to the cemetery, which, as it turned out, was located well outside the town itself.

As Sidney pulled into the unlit cemetery, he hoped to see the cars of the funeral procession, but there was nothing. He got out, flowers in hand, and walked slowly up the main path, which was illuminated for only a short distance by his lone headlight. The rain was coming down even harder. He knew now that he had missed the funeral, but he hoped to

at least locate the right grave and place the flowers on it. But he could not go very far before facing a virtual blackness in which he could not step safely. Wet and miserable, he went back to his car for the flashlight in the glove compartment. The batteries were weak, and it shone but feebly. He walked slowly among the tombstones, trying to read their names, but then it occurred to him that there might not be a proper tombstone in place yet, since Mr. Walters had died only the night before. So he tried to find a grave that looked newly dug or that had new flowers on it. He knelt to look at one more closely just as his flashlight died out for good. Not knowing what else to do, he dropped his flowers on the grave. It was probably not the right grave, but it was the thought that counted, he told himself.

Drenched and frozen, Sidney walked unsteadily back to his one-eyed car on the path, got in, and headed back toward the highway, wiping his windshield repeatedly with a hanky that was already wet and useless. He thought that perhaps if he drove straight back to the Frankfurter home and showed up on their doorstep wet to the skin and told them that he had gone to Bollenville, then they would surely appreciate his gesture, wouldn't they? He would become like a member of the family, sharing in their hopes and dreams, and he would do all the things that he had planned to do for Todd, and more, and as the years went by, he and Todd would be united by an unbreakable bond of mutual appreciation. *Appreciation.* The word itself seemed to burn with an inner warmth that made Sidney forget his physical cold temporarily, and he repeated it over and over.

He found the highway again, and as he headed back toward the city, he tried to imagine the scene on the doorstep and the future that would inevitably unfold from it. He varied the scene in his mind many times, each variation becoming more gratifying than the one before, and it was not for some moments that he noticed the needle of his temperature gauge completely off the scale -- on the hot end. The thought *Fan belt?* had barely surfaced consciously when the engine of the Buick exploded and Sidney swerved to the right and drove into the ditch, the car bouncing fearfully several times.

He opened the door with great difficulty and stumbled out just as the car caught fire. He crawled back onto the road and looked around. There was only dark countryside in



every direction -- not a single light other than his burning car.

As he stood there in the rain, he was consciously cold again. His proud, well-tuned Buick burned with a foul smell of rubber, and he could not take his eyes off it, for there in the flaming wreckage lay all his noble intentions like innocent children taken by surprise.

For several minutes he stood mesmerized until at last, knowing that there was nothing more to do, he turned his collar up and walked in the direction of home, not caring how long he might walk before someone picked him up. Ahead of him lay the rest of his poor, unappreciated life, which he would have to face without his job, his wife, or Todd Frankfurter, his Ace Mechanic.

## DREAM STREET

I was visiting my old friend Calvin in his new city, where he'd accepted a high-paying job with a brokerage firm. It was Sunday, and he was showing me around. We were on our way to see the famous tower. It was pretty quiet downtown -- hardly anyone around.

I wanted to hear Calvin talk about personal things, human things -- the way we used to. But his mind was stuck on business. "So I've been advising my clients to go after the under-priced stocks while hedging against a further decline in the market. What you do is buy a stock and sell or write a call option and use the premium to buy a put option. Now you can sell shares at a stipulated price and effectively put a floor under the potential loss, see? Like, for example, you buy shares at thirty-four dollars and sell a call option at forty dollars..."

I was giving Calvin less and less of my attention as I studied the buildings around us -- mostly old warehouses and factories, with some refurbished buildings that signaled a resurgence of vitality in the district. And even the oldest, most dilapidated buildings had some amazing architectural and ornamental features. The interplay of light and shadow, the varying textures of surfaces, the signs of human commerce, and the smells in the late spring air created a rich ambience and feelings of life and mystery. Sometimes it's impossible to put the feeling you get from a place into words. But I felt a strange warmth and excitement, and I was very happy just to be alive and to be walking along streets I'd never seen before.

"...You can either sell the put or exercise the put and sell the shares at thirty for a four-dollar loss. So the possible loss is limited, see? If the stock goes below thirty, the put is going to take care of you. You see how it works?"

"What? Yeah, I guess so." At that moment I saw the tower. "Hey, there it is." I started to turn the corner.

"Hold it," said Calvin, grabbing my sleeve. "We can't go down this street."

"Why not? There's the tower."

He seemed a bit embarrassed. "Yeah, I know. We'll go down the next block and then cut back."

"What for?"

"*Because*. Just do it, okay?"

"What's the big deal, Cal?" I asked, a note of annoyance in my voice.

"It's no big deal. I'm just saying let's take a little detour, okay?"

"You're nuts!" I said and started to walk.

He grabbed me again. "Listen to me. This is the Dream Street. It's not for people like us."

"Dream Street? What the hell are you talking about?"

"It's a bad street. It does bad things to your head. You don't know about it because you're from out of town."

I looked at the street sign. "It doesn't say Dream Street."

"I know it doesn't say it, goddamn it! But between this corner and the next it's the Dream Street."

We argued for a minute or so, and we were both getting pretty hot about it. Since I was bigger than Calvin, I told him I was going to walk down that street, and just let him try to stop me!

He was furious. "Goddamn it! Okay, just listen to me for a second, will you? We'll go down the goddamn street, but just walk straight ahead, don't stop for anything, and don't pay attention to anything you see or hear, got that? I'll be right next to you."

"It's only a street, for chrissake! Anybody can see that."

But as we started down it, a most peculiar feeling began to take possession of me -- a sort of mild delirium. A sound like that of many string instruments out of key seemed to emanate from the rooftops. Several buildings seemed to change color, from red to blue to green, and so on, and railings, stonework, and other ornaments were transformed or appeared and disappeared.

The manhole covers in the street glowed red and began to vibrate. One of them flew off, and an albino figure with a cylindrical head popped up and said, "Nah-bo, nah-bo, nah-bo..." (Was it the French word *nabot*?) A door on my right was flung open, and a gushing stream of water appeared to

rush toward us from down a long corridor. As it hit the air around us, the water turned into feathers, which stuck to my clothing and hair. I rubbed some of these feathers in the palm of my hand, and they gave off a smell of fresh lime, which I found very pleasing.

In a window I could see a fat lady frying something in a pan. She tilted the pan to allow me to see. It looked like a grey pancake. The pancake suddenly floated off the pan and out the window and turned into an umbrella-shaped creature, which flew away.

A naked girl playing marbles on the sidewalk stood up and ran to me. She was about twelve years old and had three nipples. I lifted her up. She weighed almost nothing. She pressed her lips to mine and gave me a deep kiss, and I felt an almost heart-breaking love and tenderness for her. I then sucked each of her three nipples. From the first there came a fluid with a sweet strawberry taste; from the second there came a salty taste; and from the third there came a taste like vinegar. Then she ran over to a boy who had appeared out of nowhere. She introduced him as a friend. I was about to speak when he turned into a baboon, which then turned its bright red ass toward me. I felt repelled.

Giant flying saucers appeared in the sky, and I went over to a fire hydrant with a ray gun mounted on top. I fired the ray gun at the saucers, and they exploded into tons of confetti. A paper bag also came down, which then turned into a giant rubber eye that floated in front of me. It meant to scare me, so I forced myself to stare directly into it and order it telepathically to move aside. To my astonishment, the eye secreted a huge blue teardrop and disintegrated.

In front of us, the sidewalk cracked, and a river of lava blocked the street. I told Calvin to jump at once before the crack became too wide. I jumped, but I didn't know whether Calvin had jumped or not.

On the other side, the sidewalk turned into grass and gave off a fresh country smell. The off-key string instruments now gave way to a beautiful nocturne by Debussy. I looked up and saw a billboard showing a scene from my childhood -- that extraordinary day as I walked home from school, which I have never spoken of to anyone. I felt like crying, but the tears wouldn't come. Then the scene changed into an



ad for Zud Soap, portraying an idiotic young man with a bar of soap in his mouth.

Far beyond the billboard I noticed a tornado coming toward us. I stood transfixed with fear as it came closer and closer. I fell to the pavement and closed my eyes. Then I heard birds singing. I looked up again, and the sky was clear.

When I got up, I noticed that I was wearing a pair of wooden shoes with the name *Charlie* burned into them. My friend Charlie, who runs a bookstore in Milwaukee, has such a pair of shoes in his store as a joke. A black woman with bad breath wearing a tattered terry cloth robe came up to me and said, "Dis man has a lizzer, but de lizzer doan bite you if yo name begin wid C." Sure enough, a man came along holding a monitor lizard in his arms. He smiled at me, and the lizard smiled, too. When I passed him and turned around, I saw him walking away with his arm around the black woman, who was now naked.

As we neared the end of the street, lights were flashing on the fronts of the buildings in time with a series of electronic beeps. Cylinders also popped in and out of the buildings in time with the sounds. The cylinders had starfish designs on them. When one of them fell out of the wall, a priest jumped out of the hole to retrieve it. Seeing me, he came up to me and said, "Take this before you go. It is a conscience." I thanked him as he placed a red glycerine egg in my hand, which became very hot. Just when I thought it would burn me, it turned into a porcelain turtle and was now cold and soothing. Its head and legs began to move, and it came alive. I was afraid it would bite me, so I dropped it down a sewer. Then I saw its little eyes staring at me through the grate, and I decided I'd better run.

Under my feet the sidewalk had become rubbery, and I bounced two or three times, as if on a trampoline, until I reached the corner. There was an ear-splitting crack of thunder, and I turned to my left and found Calvin standing beside me, looking angry. I looked back, and the street once again assumed a normal appearance.

"Wow! Cal! That was something! I can't believe it!"

He pulled me forward. "Let's get going. You wanted to see the tower."

"Wait a minute! Did you experience what I experienced?"

"I didn't see or hear anything!"

"But what about those lights and that girl and--"

"Don't talk to me about it!" he snapped. He stopped and glared at me. "Not one word. Not one word, got that?"

I stared back at him in amazement for a long moment, almost ready to laugh in his face. "Okay, suit yourself," I said. I was suddenly seeing Calvin anew, and something about him rubbed me the wrong way. Maybe it was the curl of his lip, or his shirt collar, or the shape of his moustache, or the way he put his hands on his hips. Or nothing in particular. Outwardly, Calvin was still Calvin, yet a sinking feeling in my heart told me that our long friendship had come to an end.

And I believe he felt exactly the same way.

## WOODEN STICKS WITH POINTS

When I was a boy in the Bronx, there was a pleasant park I used to play in. I remember that the grass was well-manicured and that there was a little pond with a fountain in the middle. The cement base of the fountain and the rim of the pond were white, and the grass was a lovely green. And all day long, men with wooden sticks with metal points at one end would walk around spearing litter. I don't recall that there was much litter to be seen, so those men must have gone after the most insignificant little scraps to keep themselves busy. And there was a nice little candy store called Jack's, where my mother would take me for an ice cream soda.

Now that park is a lot surrounded by a chain link fence. There is not one blade of grass, and the ground is literally covered (every square inch) with broken bottles, beer cans, and other junk. And across the street, the Puerto Ricans sit on the curb or lean out of their cars and drink beer and whisky and play their radios very loud. The music is very ugly and stupid. Loud music also emanates from the windows of the apartment buildings all around. All this noise and ugliness. I can only shake my head and perhaps, if no one is watching, shed a tear. It is as if no one remembers. These drunken no-goods never lived here then, and most of them would be too young to remember anyway. To the young, what exists now is normal. Jack's is gone, too. You don't find many nice stores like Jack's any more.

And now I work in a factory in another part of the city. It is a wood factory, in which all sorts of wooden products are made. Among our products are those wooden sticks with points used for spearing litter. But I am sorry to say it is a product that no longer sells. We have a half dozen very nice wooden sticks with points leaning in a dark corner, but no one seems to want them. I suppose that all over the country men have stopped spearing litter, and lovely, old parks have decayed into lifeless horrors to torment the hearts of those of us who still remember.

Every coffee break and lunch hour, I go and sit by myself in that dark corner where the wooden sticks are. I sit

on a crate and just look at those sticks and wonder how they feel leaning there, all lathed and polished and nowhere to go. I have named them. Their names are Edward, Eugene, Everett, Elliot, Eric, and Emerson. They are all very fine boys that want very much to go out into the world, either as a group or separately, and help stop lovely, old parks from turning into garbage heaps. I'm sure my co-workers and boss think I'm a very strange, old bird to sit in this corner by myself. "He likes to be alone," they say. But I'm not alone. I'm just choosy about the company I keep. I don't talk to anyone about the wooden sticks. These days it's very hard to discuss your feelings with other people. People have a way of nodding and saying "Yes, yes" and "Of course" in the most understanding manner, but you know they don't understand at all. An old man soon learns to shut up.

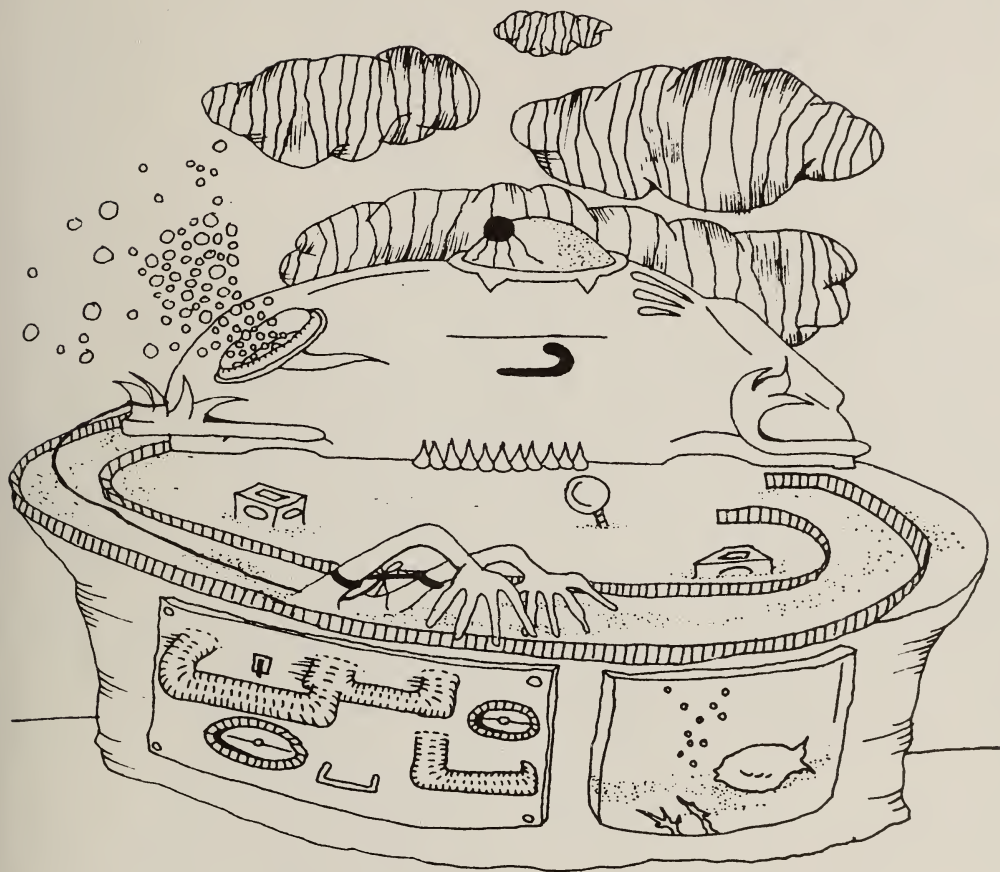
I found my old Latin exercise book from high school, and I am writing this in the back, where there are a few blank pages left. I was a very good student of Latin in my day. It is a very beautiful language -- classical and elegant and orderly -- and you should read it in a lovely park with a fountain, if you can still find one, and remember that the world is very old and has not gained as much as it has lost.

I never thought much about the men themselves who used those sticks in the park, but as they were much older than me, they have doubtless already died. Today they would be anachronisms in their trade, as I am in spirit.

I believe that when I get close to death, I should like to lie down in a Parks Department shed with the wooden sticks that are no longer used. No one would discover me until I had died and begun to decompose, and perhaps not even then. And my last thoughts would be of green grass, and white cement, and a fountain, and my Latin exercises, and ice cream sodas at Jack's, and men keeping the park so very neat with their wooden sticks with points.



## 7. PREPARING FOR DEATH: *The Kiddie Ride*



## About the Author

Crad Kilodney is probably the only writer in the world who not only publishes his own books but also sells them on the street as his sole occupation. He first appeared on the streets of Toronto in 1978 with a collection of stories published as a special issue of the American literary magazine *Lowlands Review*. The following year, he founded his own imprint, Charnel House, under which ten more titles have been published to date. Two larger books have also been published by Virgo Press and Coach House Press.

Kilodney was born in the Borough of Queens, New York City, in 1948 and graduated from the University of Michigan in 1968 with a degree in astronomy. He abandoned his scientific career after a few months in favor of a literary one. His writings have appeared in more than 60 magazines and anthologies in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain. He has no formal training in literature or creative writing.

★

*REMINDER TO OUT-OF-TOWN READERS: Please stay in touch by sending your name and address to be added to the author's private mailing list. You will receive announcements of new books as they come out. All Charnel House editions are limited.*



The eccentric humor of Crad Kilodney is often heavily laced with the bitter essence of tragedy, desolation, and a sense of loss. In this collection, Toronto's premier writer of the streets presents three new stories appearing in print for the first time.

In "Mr. Schlepp and His Ace Mechanic," a man who has just lost his job and his wife on the same day embarks on a painfully absurd campaign to make his auto mechanic famous. In "Dream Street," two friends walk down a city street that has the power to induce fantastic and dangerous visions. And in "Wooden Sticks With Points," an old man shares his whimsical and melancholy thoughts about what the world has lost.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Kilodney is a literary anarchist." -- Charles Mandel, *Books in Canada*

"A first-rate underground writer." -- York Univ. *Excalibur*

"At turns naive, bizarre, and violently satiric, Kilodney lays waste to normal perceptions...An unfettered talent at full throttle." -- Richard Peabody, *Gargoyle* (Washington, D.C.)

"Kilodney is a mad scientist/sociologist working with the world as his laboratory." -- *Small Press Review*

"Kilodney's prose is smooth and effortless, and his sense of humour razor sharp." -- Martin Waxman, *Quill & Quire*

"There's no one else like him in Canada." -- David Schatzky, CBC

CHARNEL HOUSE  
ISBN 0-9690261-9-6